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Bad News From Walter Reed Hospital

By JAMES RESION

WASHINGTON, Feb. 14—There is a delicate and even dangerous period ahead for the Western nations for they have run into a crisis of diplomacy and a crisis of leadership at the same time.

For the first time in almost a generation, there now seems to be a genuine opportunity to negotiate with the Soviets a new political and military order in Europe, and this has happened when the old generation of Western leaders is faltering.

Secretary of State Dulles has been immobilized again by cancer. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer of West Germany is in his eighties and is much more feeble than is generally realized. President Charles de Gaulle of France while much more powerful than his predecessors, is preoccupied with internal problems. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan of Britain is facing an election, which always introduces a subjective element into British policy.

Eisenhower's Reaction

Twice before, under less serious circumstances, President Eisenhower had sought help outside the Government. When Mr. Dulles was in Walter Reed Hospital in November, 1956, for his first cancer operation, the President asked his former Chief of Staff, Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, to come into the White House as a foreign affairs adviser.

Later, after Mr. Dulles had returned to work and the Western allies agreed on a policy review conference by the allied heads of government, the President and Mr. Dulles invited Adlai E. Stevenson of Illinois to accept a temporary assignment as a foreign affairs adviser in the State Department.

If these ideas had validity there is perhaps something to be learned for considering similar innovations under the present difficult circumstances. The United States is obliged to negotiate with the Soviet Union on the future of Europe in May regardless of the accident of foreign frailties.

The President said this week in reply to questions at his news conference, that he could not possibly take on more work in the field of foreign affairs, even with Mr. Dulles in the hospital, without evading some of his responsibilities in other fields.

This places a great burden on Under Secretary of State Christian A. Herter, who is himself handicapped by a painful arthritic condition, and Under Secretary of State Douglas Dillon, who has concentrated almost entirely in the field of foreign economic policy.

Accordingly there may be some validity in approaching the forthcoming international conferences with the Russians on a national rather than on a merely partisan basis.

Men such as John J. McCloy of New York, who was President Eisenhower's second choice as Secretary of State in 1952; Generals Alfred Gruenther and Bedell Smith, who have the President's confidence; Eugene Black, president of the World Bank, who is close to both Under Secretary Dillon and the new chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator J. W. Fulbright, and former Secretary of State Dean G. Acheson—all these could easily be brought together into a temporary national advisory council.

Other experts on German and Soviet problems such as George F. Kennan, former head of the State Department's policy planning staff, Paul Nitze, who also held that post under Mr. Acheson, and Charles E. Bohlen, the Soviet expert who is now in this country on leave from his post as Ambassador to the Philippines, have not been used as effectively as they might.

A Demonstration of Unity

The President, of course, would be under no obligation to accept their advice, for he is personally responsible under the Constitution for the conduct of foreign policy, but at least he would have the benefit of their ideas and meanwhile he would be able to demonstrate to the Soviets that the United States was uniting its energies and forging a national policy for the forthcoming negotiations.

Even if the President insists on holding the post open for Mr. Dulles, the present combination of unusual circumstances requires unusual innovations.

For the truth is that the man who has been running the foreign policy of this country, and to a large extent of the whole alliance, is stricken again just before his seventy-first birthday, and a national problem has arisen that can scarcely be dealt with on anything less than a national basis.